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THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER

THE APPLICATION OF ORNAMENT.—V.

BY LEWIS F. DAY.

THE geometric diaper on Fig. 30, is obviously produced by means of two stencils, the outline being formed by the portion of the ground left clear. In the case of an elaborate series of stencils each one may be schemed to make good the ties of another; but to the workman at least, there will always be an

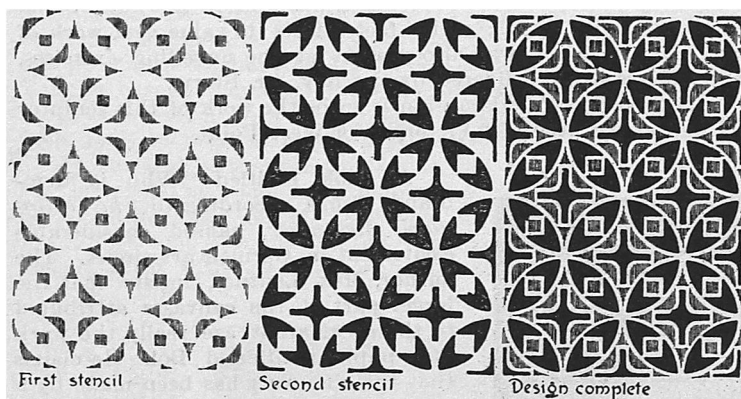


FIG. 30.—STENCIL PATTERN—AND THE WAY OF PRODUCING IT.

interest in the way an effect has been produced. He looks for character as well as beauty.

It must be confessed that he is the only one who does. This merit of workmanlike-ness is one which the public cannot, as I said, be expected to appreciate. It is reserved for the craftsman, with whom it is his pride to claim fellowship. His interest in it is not alone in seeing how another solved a difficulty which had occurred to himself, or took advantage of an accident which to him had been fruitful only of disappointment. He has a thrill of purest satisfaction in feeling how some one far away and years ago, perhaps, realized, as he does, that this, and not that, was the spirit in which such and such thing should be done,



FIG. 31.—BOOKBINDER'S TOOLING—AND THE TOOLS USED.

such and such material should be treated, saw the same hint in nature as he sees, or felt the same limitation in his art as he feels. This is the satisfaction, not of the sentimentalist, but of the workman. And no workman of any account will be

satisfied without the approbation of the fellow-workman he respects.

The tooled bookbinding, illustrated on Fig. 31, is interesting rather to the craftsman than to the artist. The ingenuity with

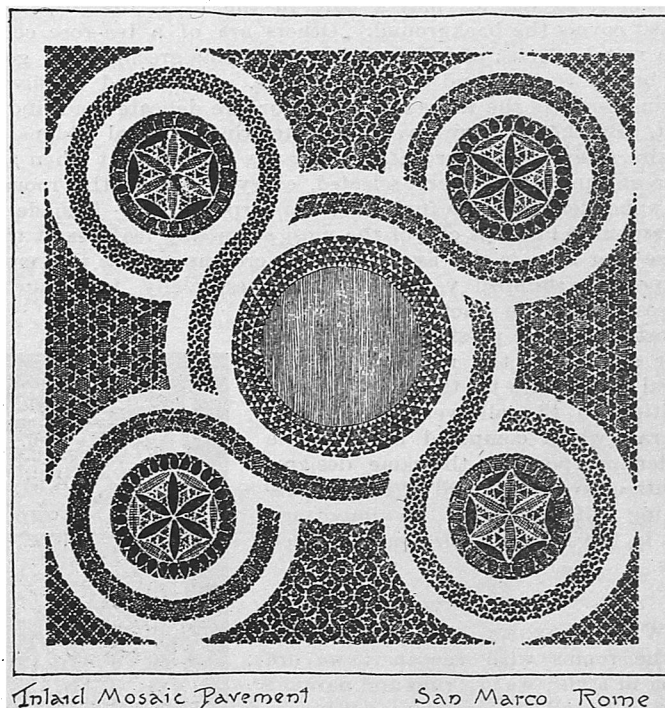


FIG. 32.—MOSAIC PAVEMENT—Workmanlike Thrift.

which a few simple and rather insignificant tools are made to suffice toward a somewhat florid effect, shows the practiced hand.

Our wonder at the splendid scheme of architectural coloring which prevailed in Italy, settles down to the conviction that it was encouraged, if not wholly suggested by the gorgeousness of the multi colored marbles within easy reach. This it was which led also to the development of a kind of decoration, very characteristically mosaic, in which the beauty of the material is displayed in large slabs of rich veneer, whilst the waste is used up in the form of geometric pattern work, the design of which is literally cut according to the chips. The contrast between the broad surfaces and the minute mosaic is exceedingly happy.

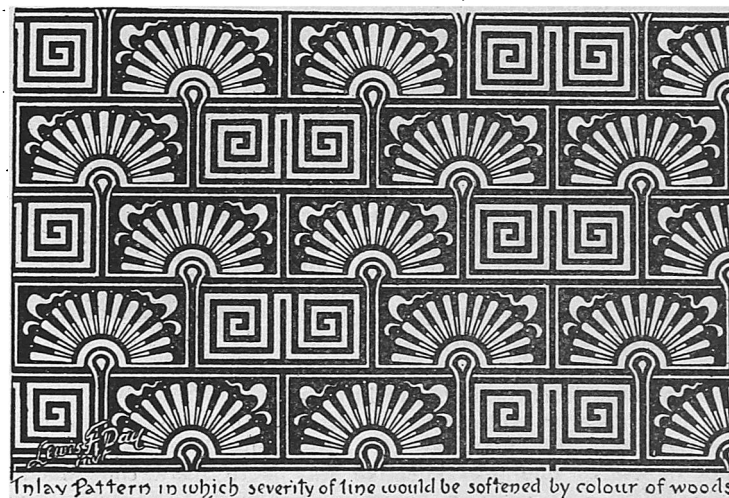


FIG. 33.—RIGID DESIGN—Requiring the Softening Influence of Color.

The large circular slabs of porphyry which form so prominent a feature in the pavements of Byzantine churches in Italy, notably in many of the Roman Basilicas (Fig. 32), afford yet further evidence of the dependence of design upon the conditions of material. These circular plaques are in fact so many slices of old columns, saved from the wreckage of more ancient buildings, and put to this ingenious use.

The common adoption of geometric patterns for inlaid pavements was countenanced by the circumstance that the unequal and accidental color of the marble cubes just counteracted the

tendency to mechanical hardness, in which lies the danger of purely geometric ornament.

In marquetry, similar geometric forms were found, for similar reasons, to be serviceable, so that one may say that, whether in wood, or mother-of-pearl, or marble, a style of inlaid work was begotten of the very facility of shaping and laying geometric forms by the certainty of the harmonizing influence of color.

It is in the inlay of natural woods and stones and the like that we find the most satisfactory use of absolutely geometric

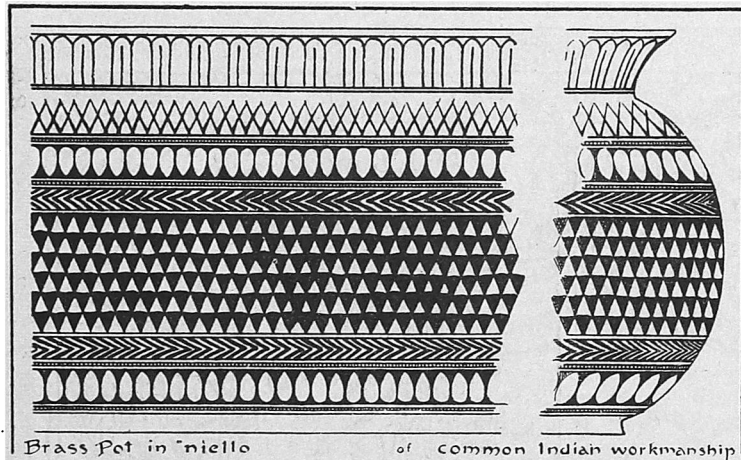


FIG. 34.—NIELLO—Severity of Pattern Calculated to be Mitigated by the Brilliancy of the Metal.

pattern. The accidental variation of the natural colors is exactly the thing needful. Unexpectedness of tint makes the amends for certainty of shape, and gives an air of mystery to what would otherwise be only so much mechanism. The rigid forms of the diaper in Fig. 33, are plainly in need of some such softening influence of color. Again, in geometric ornament like the "niello" in Fig. 34, the silver brilliancy of the metal glorifies, so to speak, the nakedness of the design.

So in the ornamental glass mosaic so often used in Italy about Giotto's time in connection with white marble, the shimmer of the surface, more especially as it was never absolutely

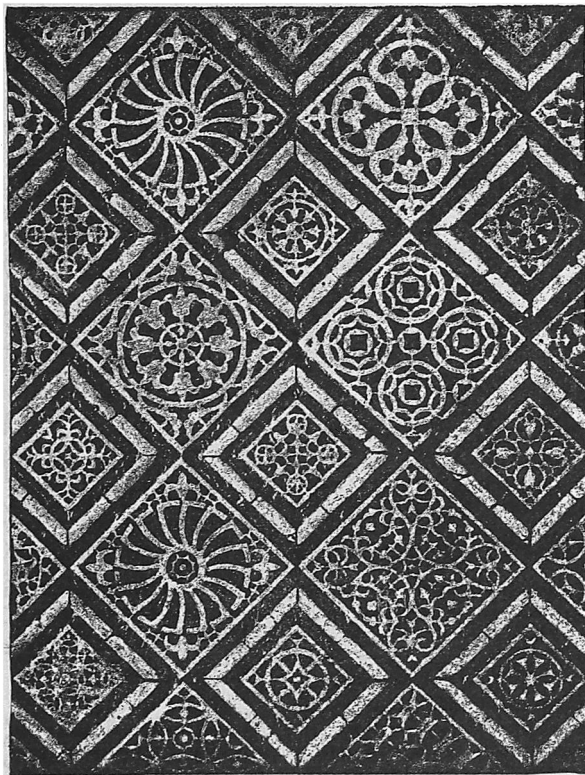


FIG. 35.—MARBLE INLAY—Practically a Fret Pattern.

even, put all contingency of harshness out of the question. Such a thing was barely possible with all those little facets of glass catching the light at all manner of angles, and glittering each according to its own bright will.

In marble inlay of strongly contrasted color there is no such excuse for severity of form; some of the old pavement patterns, that for example in the baptistry at Florence (Fig. 35), are exceedingly graceful in design. Even there you see the influence of the material. The desirability of maintaining the solidity of the white slabs into which the blackish green is inlaid, has led to a kind of network of white enclosing the darker tints, by which means the contrast between light and dark is most judiciously softened. These patterns would stencil perfectly. They are, in fact, fretted in marble.

Here it may be well to remark that, though a stencil is a kind of fret, a fret is not exactly the same as a stencil. In designing a stencil the ties are the main consideration. In designing a fret the connection of the openings is an important point. One must as much as possible avoid the hindrance of perpetually removing and refixing the saw, which, in fretting some stencil patterns, would take almost as much time as the actual cutting. Long, smooth, sweeping lines are also suggested by the saw, the backward and forward action involved in following jagged lines, such as the serrated edges of leaves, resulting in some waste of labor.

Very characteristic design occurs in the wooden lattice-work

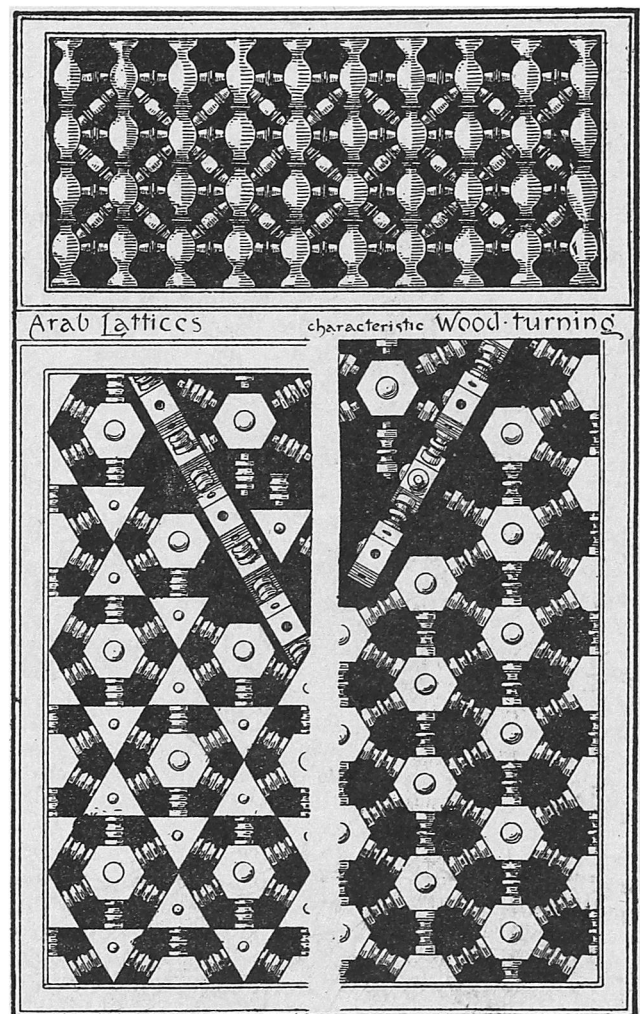


FIG. 36.—ARAB LATTICES—Characteristic Wood-Turning.

which has lately been imported from Cairo, and freely used (not always with discretion) in the decoration and furniture of English houses (Fig. 36). Better lattices it would be difficult to find, or a better way of employing otherwise not very useful scraps of wood, or a better employment of wood turning. This Cairene woodwork indicates equally the scarcity of large timber, the cheapness of labor, and the dependence upon the lathe. Had the conditions been other, we should never have had just such patterns as the Arab builders evolved in infinite variety.

The characterlessness of the nineteenth century ornament is due very largely to any direct impress of the the tool upon the design. In the process of modern manufacture, everything is planed down to a marvellous but monotonous smoothness; the mark of the tool, which is the evidence of workmanlikeness, is popularly regarded even as bad work—want of finish, indeed. Even in this age of enlightenment there are some who have yet to

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learn that work may be smooth and smug, and yet not beautiful, nor so much as finished.

This mistaken ideal of perfection is not, it must be owned, altogether a modern one. In tapestry, for example, designers have been working for centuries past, steadily in the pictorial direction, and against the threads; until there is now little difference between the picture and its copy in wool, except that the copy costs ever so much more than the original. Already in the comparatively early tapestries of Raffaele, you can see at

The crowning point of ignorance and inconsistency in design is reached where the convention peculiar to and characteristic of some quite different material is affected, as in the bulbous forms of beaten metal reproduced in fifteenth century Gothic stone-work, or in the facets of Brobdingnag jewels in Elizabethan wood-carving.

Affectation of that kind seems to throw into stronger relief the fitness of fit ornament.

(To be continued.)



Dresden or Beauvais what inferior and characterless hangings his famous cartoons make as compared with the neighboring designs of earlier, unknown, and less accomplished draughtsmen, who knew their trade. That Raffaele either knew little or cared little about tapestry, is clear. And in his failure there is some consolation for the least of us. If we only love our trade, and know it (as only those can who love it), we may succeed where a Raffaele would fail, though we be anything but Raffaelles. It is easier said than done, for a great painter to step down to mastery in the minor arts. All trades want learning.

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